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# THE NEGRO AND THE IMMIGRANT IN THE TWO AMERICAS

## AN INTERNATIONAL ASPECT OF THE COLOR PROBLEM

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To the colored man of foreign birth, and especially of Latin-American origin, who lands on American shores fifty years after the issuance of the emancipation proclamation, the keenness of racial antipathy and the persistence of statutory discrimination in various states against persons of African descent form a feature of American life as puzzling in its *raison d'être* as it is annoying and unpleasant in its operation. "Why is it," asked the distinctly Negroid officers and sailors of the Brazilian dreadnaught which recently visited this country, "that in the street cars at Norfolk we had to be separated from our white or white Indian fellows and friends? In New York the petty officers of our ship were invited to an entertainment by the men of similar rating on an American battleship and the waiters at the hotel refused to serve some of our men who were black. We cannot understand these things."

Small wonder that the foreign visitors should have evinced surprise at this disagreeable feature of an otherwise memorably pleasant reception in the United States of America. It is hardly twenty-five years since the last vestiges of slavery were removed from the then infant United States of Brazil, but that country knows no distinction of color or race. Law and custom guarantee equal opportunity to all citizens in every field of usefulness to the republic, and some of the most distinguished presidents, to say nothing of lesser officials, have been men of Negro blood. In this country, on the other hand, where people have better opportunities for education and ought to be and claim to be more enlightened and humane than the peoples to the south, fifty years after a most destructive war which is supposed to have abolished all distinctions in citizenship, racial prejudice pursues with a most relentless and intolerant hatred the faintest trace

of African blood and even over-rides the common demands of international courtesy and renders impossible the attainment of that Pan-American Union, based on genuine good-will and mutual respect, which the republic of the north is now so anxious to form.

The characteristic point of view of the Latin-American with regard to the diverse constituent elements in the population of his country is that racial considerations shall not operate to deprive a citizen of the opportunity of useful service to his country nor to rob him of the recognition due to such service. No man is assumed to be superior or inferior to any other man because of the color of his grandmother's skin. Every man who demonstrates his worth commands and receives the respect and appreciation of his fellows. Political and economic difficulties and dissensions there may be, but race is not a controlling factor in governmental policy and in the everyday conduct of the people. The Indian, Benito Juarez, proved himself at least a more enduring ruler of Mexico than did the white man, Madero, and, whatever else may be said of Porfirio Diaz, the fact of his Indian blood has never been held up as a reproach against him by such pure whites as live in the country of the Aztecs. Nor is the Spanish-American mind capable of denying to men of Negro blood the recognition to which their abilities entitle them. Despite northern influence, the name of the mulatto Maceo is yet revered with that of Máximo Gómez, of doubtful whiteness, as a national hero of Cuba, and Juan Gualberto Gómez is still one of the most honored patriots of the first American protectorate. In countries where there is now little, if any, trace of Negro blood in the population, there is no tendency to forget the services of colored men in the past. Buenos Ayres is adorned with a statue of Falucho, a Negro soldier, and the Government of Venezuela has just dedicated in Caracas a monument to Alexandre Pétiou, the mulatto president of Haïti whose aid, in men and money, to Simón Bolívar at the most critical moment in the fortunes of the Libertador led to the independence of the vast region which now comprises the republics of Venezuela, Colombia, Panamá, Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru. Thus, at a time when the Monroe Doctrine could not have been enforced by the nation which gave the name of its president to Great Britain's proposal for a joint Anglo-American recognition of the new republics, the earliest formed and last recognized of these nations, peopled by men who are by law and custom invariably "inferior" to white men in North America,

Haïti, the Black Republic, had already struck the most vital blow at Spanish rule in America and paved the way for the present dominant position of the United States in the Western Hemisphere.

Knowing these facts, it is not surprising that white men in Latin-America, and there are more of them than Anglo-Saxon America is inclined to think, do not regard the possession, real or suspected, of Negro blood as a crime punishable with eternal and irrevocable exclusion from everything that savors of honorable service and due consideration in one's country. If these facts were also known or acknowledged by white men between the Gulf of Mexico and the Great Lakes, it is possible that the Brazilian visitors would have been spared the dread of terrors unseen and, for them, perhaps non-existent; but nevertheless, well founded on their observation of the gulf that separates the native white from the non-white of North America. "If I went into one of these restaurants along Broadway," asked the son of a Portuguese from the Azores, whose ability has won him a position of trust and responsibility as an officer in the navy of his colored mother's country, "would they serve me as they would in Paris or Newcastle-on-Tyne or Rio de Janeiro?" The only way to secure an answer to such a question, would, of course, be to enter the restaurant and order food. The response would perhaps be in the negative, but in any case it would most likely be made by a man who was not himself a native of this country, who had not become thoroughly familiar with the language and had not thought it necessary to relinquish his allegiance to some European monarch in order to enjoy the benefits of residence in a country which is, to him, free. For a most important element in the maintenance of anti-Negro feeling in this country since the Civil War is the constant and ever-increasing stream of immigration from Europe.

Fifty years ago, the waiter in New York and in many other Northern cities was usually a man of color, as was the barber, the coachman, the caterer or the gardener. True enough, he had little opportunity to rise above such menial occupation, but with the growth of the humanitarian, if rather apologetic, attitude toward the Negro engendered by the great conflict which had brought about the verbal abolition of slavery in the states where it then existed, it is possible that the Negro's status in New York and the other free states would have been rapidly and permanently improved, industrially as well as in civic recognition, had not the current of immigration, which had been

retarded for a decade or two during the Civil War and the preceding agitation, started with renewed force on the cessation of the conflict. The newcomer from Europe had to be provided for. Being more suited to the climate and conditions of life in the Northern States and at the same time possessing greater skill and experience, not only in the menial employments which had engaged the Negroes, but also in the trades and industries in which the freedmen had acquired during slavery a rudimentary foundation, the European immigrant soon outstripped his Negro rival for the employment and the respect of the American in the Northern States. With his economic position thus secured, the new American, knowing little or nothing of the terrible struggle which had preceded his coming, looked and still looks upon the Negro with the contemptuous eye of an easy victor over a hopelessly outnumbered, weak and incompetent foe. I do not pretend to say that the immigrant is not often to be found among those who keep alive the torch of liberty and justice in America, but I do believe that the continuance of racial hatred in the North is traceable to the Europeans whose lack of contact with the Negro has been exploited and played upon by native whites who have nothing to think and talk about but an exaggerated idea of the virtues and capacities of the Anglo-Saxon race.

In the Southern States where, although there is little direct immigration, the poor white population, particularly in the southwest, has been largely increased by recruits from the Americanized immigrant population of the North, the Negro, by reason of his numbers, has been able to make a better showing in industry. This condition is in no small measure due to the fact that the ruling classes prefer the Negro to the immigrant. But, whatever the reason, the black people still hold their own and, despite efforts to check them, they are constantly securing a firmer footing in the industries of the South. For the present at least, the European immigrant is not likely to become a dangerous economic menace to the Negro in the South. Some few years ago an attempt to start a line of steamers transporting European settlers from Hamburg to Charleston met with disastrous failure. Experiments with Italian agriculturists in Mississippi and elsewhere have not influenced the tendency of the Negro to become a landowner, for *The Progressive Farmer*, a southern agricultural organ, has found it necessary to start a campaign for the passage of laws to check the encroachment of Negroes upon territory occupied by white farmers.

Without the hindrance of artificial restrictions, the effect of which cannot be permanent, the position of the Negro in the agriculture of the Southern States seems to be assured. Present tendencies in other industries in these states, and it is only in these that the Negro is ever likely to be an important economic factor, seem to guarantee the black man "the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" in equal security with the white man. In the mining regions of Alabama and Tennessee the proprietors of mines, with the aid of aspirants to political honors, have been in the habit of fomenting race prejudice as a means of nullifying the power of union labor by forcing the men to form racial unions and by using the one as a club to suppress the other group in case of a strike. In Alabama two years ago the governor, without a shade of legal authority, ordered the militia to raze a strike camp just as the miners were nearing success, because the promiscuous arrangement of the tents occupied by white and colored people did not meet with the approval of a public opinion which cared nothing about the color of the men while in the mines. The miners themselves had very different ideas and it is probable that experiences of this kind will force them to a fearless recognition of the unity and identity of the interests of labor. The Socialist party and the I. W. W. have done much for the admission of colored men to labor unions and the I. W. W. has met with notable success in this respect in the lumber camps of Louisiana. In many other important industries as, for instance, ship-carpentry at Savannah and other ports, colored men are admitted into the unions with white men. Southern cotton mills are beginning to employ Negro labor. As a result of the recent anti-Japanese agitation, employers and workmen alike have come to regard the Negro as the lesser of two evils and, in railroad construction in several places in the West and Northwest, black men have been engaged to replace the oriental laborers. During the past half century, the dominant, if unexpressed, idea in the mind of the average white man toward the colored man who sought the right to earn his bread anywhere in this country was that he ought to be crushed and eliminated if his labor in any way savored of competition with the white man. But with the growing recognition of the inter-dependence of the races and the increased tolerance of labor unions toward black men, competition between Negroes and immigrants tends to give way to coöperation between black men and white all over the country.

This is the condition that exists in Brazil, where the free people

of color, both on account of their numbers and of their ability, had secured a footing from which they could not be shaken by an immigration which has not been so large or so different in origin and standards of life from the native worker as has been the case with the immigrant and the Negro in North America. When the center of American interests is transferred from considerations of race to the recognition of those surer standards of birth, education and ideals, by which alone citizenship is to be adjudged, racial prejudice against the Negro and Negroid will become as insignificant in Anglo-Saxon America as it is rare in Latin-America. Toward this end the Negro and the immigrant should strive by removing the barriers of color and of mutual fear or distrust which separate them, in order to make possible the realization of the new and really United States of North America, without which there can be no union of all America.